

Swimming is never without risk.

Opening up on learning through activism and research.

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Abstract

This paper examines my own becoming as Elisabeth and as a researcher. It is about working as a support worker, coaching teams that are trying to realize inclusive education for a child, and my PhD-process, which relies on these practices. My intention here is to unfold several aspects, blockages, possibilities, and tensions that can make sense of my messy struggle. The never-ending learning through working with people, listening to their stories, and taking responsibility are important ingredients of my engagement. It is necessary to provide insights and justify my multiple positions in order to avoid falling into a narcissistic trap. In doing so, I will seek help from Levinas and in concepts of Deleuze and Guattari to (re-)construct my own understanding.

Some signposts along the way

Writing this article meant looking back at the last 10 years of my life - a long (and for me: very meaningful) period. These reflections are about my positions as a subject during this work: Elisabeth - advocate - partner - pedagogue - mother - researcher and many more. It is a personal story told from my own point of view. It has to do with me, the things I do and what I learn(ed). It also has to do with other people, their 'gifts', the doubts and challenges they shared. It is a difficult exercise to do justice to everything and everyone. I have imposed a chronology onto events which usually seemed to occur together or only became visible afterwards. The story is not as linear as I will portray it. Almost everything I came across seemed like a coincidence at the time. There were no planned and progressive stages. Some things developed very gradually, while others happened simultaneously. Some I was aware of, others really took place on a subconscious, intuitive level. The further I get, the more strongly I am convinced: I am a subject of lack (Lather, 2008). I will never get it right or complete. My becoming and the processes I engage with are complex, ungraspable as a 'whole' and ongoing. Let's dive in somewhere 'in the middle', because things do not begin to live except in the middle (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007: 55).

Feeling currents in the water

Towards the end of my master's training, two important seeds were planted. They felt like two confrontations with different relationships in working with and looking at people (with a disability). I felt very attracted. I wanted to try it and make it part of myself. At the same time it frightened me: could I do this? It looked like troubled water, but people along the path pulled me in and I was also curious - so I followed. I came to understand these encounters with the Other as my lines of flight. They made small ruptures in my everyday

habits of thought and initiated minor dissident flows (Roy, 2003: 31 as cited in: Gough, 2006: 63)

During my master's I took part in two intensive programs on inclusive education. The ideas bit deep into me. Seeking different ways of education for children with a disability and being introduced to 'real' persons (and not to their disabilities) intrigued me. I heard a mother and a teacher talk about a boy they lived/worked with; his story touched me greatly: the child, the parent, and their perspectives on everyday education. The shared searching of the mother and the teacher was impressive. I wanted to know the boy, his family, and the school. It happened: I met Kobe, a boy I was going to work with as a personal support for 3 years.

Around the same period, I got involved with strong men and women in the Flemish self advocacy movement. I saw people angry, banging their fist on the table. They were listening to each other and exchanging stories about their lived and very concrete experiences. The discovery that those men and women had the ability to speak about who they were and what they wanted was an eye-opener. People could be very clear about what support felt like 'good' support and that only the receiving person can decide on that. It was not about me and my 'good' intentions. They talked about a lot of useless support, support they didn't ask for, support that people are not given in order to prove that they cannot do it themselves, etc. Support, I learned, really has to make the person feel supported, otherwise it has little worth. I felt like Alice in Wonderland, but became active and still work as a voluntary advisor there.

In this story of encounters with the Other, Levinas and his radical othercenteredness is very helpful. The Other is crucial, the only way to be able to think and talk about me. Safstrom (1999: 227) sees that: "The Other gives the subject meaning. The meaningful subject, the self, becomes a consequence

of the relationship to the Other – a relation which does not strive for the coinciding with oneself (Levinas, 1994: 118). Otherness becomes constituting for the subject's being." This way of working has serious consequences. "It is only when I come to see that the meaning of my being is in being 'hostage' for the Other that I can realize what I am" (Chinnery, 2003: 8). The appeal of the Other is so strong that I cannot do other than follow and serve. It demands a response that cannot be prepared beforehand, I have to surrender. The relation with the Other is an ethical relationship, where I am no longer in control. "Levinas proposes that the ethical relation is modulated through the way in which I welcomes the Other, receives from the Other and is taught by the Other. (...) He describes welcoming the Other as the self's capacity to learn from the Other as a teacher" (Todd, 2008: 171). In the two situations described above, I experienced intensively how powerful the appeal of the Other is and how much wisdom you receive in actively listening to it.

Swimming without a proper stroke: working as a personal assistant of Sofie

I spent 7 years as a personal assistant together with Sofie. I followed her through primary school and supported her two (later one) days a week in class, but also at home and during leisure activities and holidays. I was confronted with so many different contexts and got to experience many different things that went together with Sofie as a (disabled) child: standing up at night to check on her, seeing fear in the eyes of a teacher when Sofie came into the class, strange fevers, buying an adapted car, looking for appropriate communication devices, not being able to understand what she was saying and many others.

I've learned a lot from the personal contact with Sofie. Because of the intensity of support Sofie needed, I got very close. We had to build on a relationship of trust to work together. It helped to know who Sofie was when I learned to see her as the daughter of Rita and Toon, the pupil of the class of Mr Patrick, the

friend of Guldane, and so much more. Radical openness brought me closer to the individual person, Sofie, with all her possibilities and difficulties and in connection with the people who loved her. Her appeal was very strong and demanding, so I could not help but take responsibility. It was inescapable. There were no conditions attached, no receipts or reciprocating services were asked (Isarin, 2005). I was committed because she challenged me and I wanted to respond. Searching for how Sofie could participate and find her place among other people was my way to fulfil my obligation towards her.

From the beginning, we started from the 'voice' of Sofie. She had an opinion. What did she want? Just ask her! When she took the initiative, even in very small ways, we followed her. We wanted to give her a certain feeling of choice and 'control' over her support and in what happened with her in the class and outside. "To recognize the Other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as You in a dimension of height" (Robbins, 1999: 6 as cited in: Simon, 2003: 55). This asymmetry opened a 'space' where the two of us could both learn and find ourselves in exposure and vulnerability to each other. "It is the orientation to the Other which affirms her independence, her height, her foreignness" (Todd, 2008: 180).

Often, but especially in the beginning, I didn't have a clue about what I could do, how Sofie could learn, and how we should adapt her learning material. I did not want to feel like a 'professional'. I wanted to distance myself from that dirty, uncomfortable word. I felt I couldn't meet the expectations that went with the 'job'. I was not a real teacher and yet I was working in a classroom. I didn't have a lot of expertise about children with serious disabilities, and with what I had I could not 'help' a child like Sofie to participate in a regular class. The only time I had seen such a girl was in a class with four children listening to Enya and tasting fruit to learn the difference between sour and sweet. I had to leave my references about schooling behind. "Such an ethics, informed by Levinas and not in itself a theory, but rather a reorientation to human

subjectivity has as its core an absolute responsibility to the Other because of one's own inadequacy in the face of the demand of the Other" (Critchley, 2007 in Allan, forthcoming). What I could offer was very little except my commitment and my energy. I wanted to be seen as ordinary and approachable in order to get solidarity and shared interests from her, the teacher, the other children, the support workers, and her parents.

We were working a lot through trial and error, interpreting situations and moments. I had to learn to see with new eyes. I became more at ease when I discovered a new lexicon. Talking about 'response' became talking about the gestures and body language of Sofie with which I was familiar. Talking about 'participation' was a continuous search: she was involved in the classroom but not at every moment nor in the same manner as other pupils. Listening to and observing her parents, we learned to see through positive spectacles in the class. We were thinking and talking in terms of opportunities and possibilities for Sofie to participate and engage in 'real' contexts. That does not mean that difficulties did not exist, but they were not in the front seat. We learned that for every problem there exists a solution - one which you don't find in advance but often at the time or through a lot of searching. In working this way, we saw Sofie (and our own confidence) grow and change. That was very important in reassuring us that our collaborative work was appropriate. However, each time we thought we had found something, Sofie asked otherwise or the circumstances changed. We constantly had to be 'awake', tune into her desires and adapt ourselves and our way of working. "Responsibility is about surrender and openness to the other, about saying 'yes' to the otherness of the other, and about suffering through anxious situations not of our own making, but to which we are nonetheless called to respond" (Chinnery, 2003: 7).

I've learned a lot about giving support. In working with Sofie, I had to 'listen' and watch her very carefully and minutely in order to know my position and

what I could do. Safstrom (2003: 28) understands it: "It is the individual uniqueness of the student that exists beyond his/her institutional position as student, which teachers [support workers] meet -and defend- in their answerability and self-questioning: (...) Have I the right to teach [support]? (...) It is continuously answered within the teaching that actually takes place, within the dialogue where response to the other becomes possible." I had to allow Sofie's guidance. "I am approached by the Other prior to any choice of thought, so that the priority of the self is challenged by the priority of the Other, towards whom I move and through whose address I am called into being as one responsible" (Strahn, 2007: 422). Levinas (1981: 48-50) speaks of passivity as being affected, touched and sensitive to the Other. What does Sofie want? How does she want it? When does she want me close? When do I have to keep my distance in order to let other people (teacher, classmates) take their responsibility? I had to earn the right to work with her over and over again.

We practised a lot in creating bridges and supporting connections. Sofie needed intensive support, but it was not the support workers who had to be 'best friends' with Sofie. A very important part of our 'job' was helping to create ways of interaction, cooperation, and connection between Sofie, the teacher, and other children. We realised that the interactions and relationships which Sofie had with people in her surroundings determined how she was present and how people viewed her contribution. Sofie's parents were guiding forces in this group of people who worked, lived, played, and interacted with her. When I made my application for the job as personal assistant, Sofie's mother was very clear. The cooperation between Sofie, her other support worker, and the teacher was working really well. If I couldn't fit it with that, my help was not required. I felt daunted, but it helped to know my place in the whole context of Sofie.

Together with Sofie and her parents, I met a close network of people around them. The collaboration and intimate connections with Sofie, her parents, the teacher, peers and the other personal assistant was very intense. We sat a lot together with wine and food – formally and informally - we phoned and mailed, we had daily written correspondence about what happened in class, we discussed new and better adaptations. We were thinking and practicing in terms of opportunities and possibilities for the participation and engagement of Sofie in ‘real’ contexts. Engaging in a pedagogical relationship is “learning with, about and from others that could not have been specified in advance” (Biesta 2003: 65).

Another swimsuit: coaching teams around children in inclusive education

While I was working for Sofie, I met other children and parents who were looking for support with their situation of inclusive education. It helped me to broaden and deepen my experiences and praxis by transferring to other contexts with other children, while not in the position of acting directly myself in the class. I now also realize – looking back - that indignation is an important facilitator in my work. I was often (very) angry when I heard about the injustice children and parents suffered in their fight for inclusive education. Being an ally and actively standing in the wind with them was the only thing I could offer.

I cannot relate every story of every child. I can only give some flavour of the precious moments that influenced my way of thinking and working in coaching teams.

Charlie left a small village school after 8 years in the same class group. He finished his 6th year of primary school in a show the class produced themselves. Every child was pictured there as classmates understood him/her. Charlie that evening was very ‘awake’, very focussed on what was happening and constantly aware of his own

contribution and at the same time connected with what the others were doing. His support worker was not with him. The other children had, during their preparation, figured out together how they could stand by him and help when it was necessary. Charlie himself made sure that he wasn't forgotten by yelling, waving his arms or pulling one of his mates towards him. He was clearly brought on stage as a Don Juan with very fine humour and able to play with language. During his moment on stage, Charlie and his wheelchair were an integral part of the dance act. Every piece of the chair and of Charlie's body was used in the performance. He was in the middle, enjoying himself tremendously, focusing very hard on doing everything right.

We put a lot of effort into getting a place for Lily at the same school where she had attended kindergarten, which was only one street away from her house. Her parents were to be asked to explain and justify their choice to continue her inclusion process and we had the opportunity to answer all the school's questions concerning class practice. After several meetings with and without us, the school made their decision and the headmaster phoned to say: "No, we will not do it. In the end, it boils down to: we are too scared." Lily's mum and I started to visit other schools. We saw 7 schools in all, of which 2 decided to give it a chance. In the car coming home from one of the schools, Lily's mum said: "I feel like I am in a shop window with my daughter. I never got to do this with my other girl who is 'normally' developing. I made my choices and that was that. Most of the time they were glad that I came. Now, with Lily, it's different. I have to show them everything of her and myself. I have to make a good impression, be sure of what I am doing, and defend her education but be always understanding to their ideas and problems. Everybody thinks he knows what is best for her. Her and our lives become the common good." [my translation from the Dutch]

Ruby's teacher is on my phone. She has to explain to her colleagues why she wants Ruby to stay with her classmates, even though she did not reach the standard for passing the first year of primary school. "Can you help me to put all the arguments together? I know that the social relationships are very important, but can you give me some arguments to back this up?" We talk about Ruby's wellbeing in the group and her individual educational plan.

When William was about to start his third year of secondary education, a lot of teachers had questions concerning the practical sessions for vocational subjects. Would William do what they expected of him? In the workplace they would not be in a position to check on him all the time. What if he ran away? What if he drank poison? He would be working with real tools. What if he wounded somebody? They were open to ideas but generally very negative about the prospect of teaching William. His mother was fielding a lot of questions and together we tried to tackle each argument. His father remained very quiet for a long time but then said: "I understand a lot of your questions. You do not know William. You do not know how to handle children with Down's syndrome. Fourteen years ago, I had the same problem, but nobody asked me if I wanted to do it, I just had to try and make the most of it." [my translation from the Dutch]

I want now to turn to Levinas to discuss some elements that were very important for my position in working in these kinds of situations. I do so in the strong belief that it is essential to give people the authentic sense that they are not alone, to listen to their stories carefully and spend time with them without expecting recognition. Our fates are intertwined, for a brief moment or as long as they want. In supporting, interacting, fighting, and working together, we are made most aware of the threads of responsibility for the (education of the) child which bind us. This proximity is situated on the level of sensibilities between humans and therefore cannot be pinned down to fixed structures and predefined tasks. I can be very close and I can feel touched, but what it is that has passed between us is often beyond my capacity to comprehend. I could never fully grasp or take on the emotional bond of a parent towards their child. I can never feel how a child with a disability feels part of a regular classroom. I do not have to try to overcome the distance of the difference. "The substitution of inspiration involves carrying the Other, as other, right in my very interiority, without becoming one with the other" (Peperzak, 1997: 109 as cited in Joldersma, 2008: 50).

A lot of my work came down to listening very carefully. There is an appeal from the Other that I can sense. The Other can be a child, a parent, a teacher, or another professional involved in the process of inclusive education. Listening to the Other requires a relationship of respect and obligation. It needs a strong commitment to dialogue where response to the Other becomes possible and I cannot claim to know and be able to explicate for the Other. Rinaldi (2006: 65) speaks about "listening as sensitivity to the patterns that connect, to that which connects us to others; abandoning ourselves to the conviction that our understanding and our own being are but small parts of a broader, integrated knowledge that holds the universe together." I am trying to listen to the Other from his/her own position. "The listening aspect of learning from a teacher is not only a good strategy, but points to the very subjectivity of being human, to evidence of the 'I' in terms of 'Here I am!'" (Joldersma, 2008: 53).

Searching for encounter and relation means opening up oneself to the Other and being ready to respond. It is about curiosity, communication and being able to surrender. Knowing about me and my personal situation and showing genuine interest allowed children and parents to show kindness and concern and to engage in an ordinary human relationship. Todd (2003: 41) puts this in Levinasian terms: "When I show love, generosity and affection, I do so to ensure that further openness and communication are possible and that the other is given the space and time to become themselves responsive/responsible subjects." Openness also requires flexibility. I cannot deliver a standard package of services. As a result of listening to and negotiating about what people want me to do; I can do many different things, from babysitting to going to file a complaint at the Ministry of Education, and from talking with the teacher about using a calculator during maths to coordinating the support of the child during their school career.

This degree of openness also brings risk: "It is the exposure to the other in which a risk is taken, a risk to suffer without reason, for nothing. (...) In order to enter into an ethical relation with the student, the risk embedded in the saying is an inevitable one. It is an uncertainty and vulnerability of uncovering oneself for the student. The risk (...) makes the welcoming of the other possible" (Safstrom, 2003, p 25-26). In being a *compagnon-de-route* for children and parents, you have to give up your 'safe' position as the professional. You have to be prepared to fight and get your hands dirty. You share moments when they feel pride when success has been achieved. You also cry when people are disappointed, damaged or deprived of their rights. You cannot shut out the pain people face when society and education puts the emphasis on 'normality'. As a pedagogue in inclusive education, I feel affinity with jazz musicians, who, as Chinnery notes (2003: 13): "Engage in rigorous study and practice in order to build up their memory of repertoires, then, at the moment of performance, they must suspend deliberation and abandon the known in order to embrace risk and vulnerability. It is about the capacity to vulnerability and exposure to the Other, to the pains and pleasures of human life."

In working together and actively doing and being involved with children and inclusive education, my need to search for meaning only grew. I felt often as if I were walking a tightrope, but the process delivered me penetrating encounters and experiences with great potential. Sometimes it went together with anger and frustration. Sometimes I could enjoy intensely goose bump moments when children were able to participate and belong in their class. Below, I want to make a connection between this Levinasian encounter with the Other and the desire of Deleuze.

'Desire' is about experimenting with "dare to become all that you cannot be" (Massumi 1992: 41, also cited in O'Shea 2002: 930). Desire and belief steer my rhizomatic way of thinking. "Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome

enables us to concentrate on a mobile, disjunctive relational self which evades oppression in avoiding 'being' in any static and essentialist sense" (Linstead and Pullen, 2006: 1295). The rhizome is always relational, it is about connecting and becoming – "the rhizome is uniquely alliance... the rhizome is conjunction" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 25). It is about continuously being open and answering possibilities of being affected by difference. The rhizome can be seen as "productive, creating lines of flight and other futures" (Diedrich, 2005: 238-239). By moving in a rhizomatic way and getting involved in processes of (de)territorialisation, you are challenged all the time to become somebody other than who you are, what you are. "The rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21).

Desire pushes you and leads you to new and positive futures. On the back of desire you fly along rhizomes away from a stable and universal identification as a 'pedagogue', 'support worker', 'activist', 'researcher', 'mother', 'friend', and 'academic'. You discover always new connections and possibilities. You construct and reconstruct yourself over and over. You do not have to look for these processes very hard, they just happen. Desire gives you endless opportunities to keep in movement and continuously become by crossing borders, dichotomies, and categories. You are privileged to meet a multiplicity of differences. "Productive desire is a power, a passion that moves one towards something new, the other. Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 26).

In supporting children with a disability and working in education, the perspective of desire has serious consequences for ourselves and the children

we work with. It means we cannot focus on 'individualism' and 'autonomy' as ultimate or even desirable outcomes for a human being. As Gibson (2006: 190) points out: "The goal of independence limits desire and the appreciation of connectivity. It reinforces disability as limitation rather than possibility and thus may contribute to legitimizing the repressive systems that exclude disabled people." She pleads for "possibilities in experimenting with various forms of dependency, giving and receiving, expecting nothing and everything."

Breaking the waves: Becoming Elisabeth – Becoming Researcher

From the very beginning, there was a lot of reflection on what I was doing. For Freire (1970), praxis is about doing and reflecting. I often sat together with Sofie's parents and other support workers to talk about her and our way of working. As an advisor in the self-advocacy movement, the self-advocates and other advisors were very active with their critical support at meetings. Our kitchen table at home was filled with stories brought by my partner from his role as a support worker with one of the children I was following closely. I talked a lot with children, parents, teachers, special educators, and headmasters about education and including children with a disability. We faced a lot of uncertainties, tensions, and feelings of crisis but could support each other in creating new thinking and exchanging different perspectives. We shared the same belief and passion in always looking for possibilities in a positive, non-judgemental way. All this activity was interwoven with my work at the university: I read texts, I had discussions with my supervisor and colleagues, all of whom were involved (though they may not have known it) in a 'secret army'. I was also working with students. I learned from and with the Other. "Meaning making and knowledge construction occur in this relational activity, in a continuous process of formulation and reformulation, testing and negotiation" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005: 102).

Working as a researcher was really a (very) slow maturation process. I realised that all the things I've learned could be shared with other people. At the same time, the parents of Sofie were doing their best to spread the story of their daughter to show other people what is possible. They did this in their working with other people, in their engagement in events for people with disabilities, and other ways. I also engaged with tacit knowledge in exploring the perspectives of other children, parents, and teachers. I could fall back on this and use it to look at interview material, participant observations, and concrete situations in class. From just wanting to be involved to really getting my head around the theoretical concepts that would help me make sense of the complex reality of children in school was a long, never-ending process.

Several struggles went along with this effort. I had a lot of different material from a lot of different angles, levels, sources, perspectives... It was very messy. What was I going to look at? Where was I going to focus? It took me back and forth between setting up new projects and falling back on my ongoing practice. I really had the feeling that the practice I was involved in was just too close to me. I was very much going with the flow but was not able to find a way of describing it. The process caused me to dig in and out of several dark tunnels and come up against a lot of dead ends. I could not arrive at a real sense of what my PhD would be about and what would (not) be part of it. My process as a researcher was constructed through contemporaneous advances, choices, standstills, and retreats that took me in many directions. It took a lot of energy to find concepts that could help me to make sense of and re-think what I had experienced in working with children, parents, and schools.

I struggled in all my writing and talking to find the appropriate words which would open up potentialities rather than close them down the whole time. Working with children with serious communication difficulties was one of my first attempts to identify a group of children that I would like to work

with but that was not recognized as a DSM IV label. This obligation to think outside of categories and disabilities can make my work very broad but also very vague. On the other hand, I could never totally escape the difficulties the children experienced or it would look as if I didn't want to recognize them. The struggle became only worse as I went further. I constantly had to be alert, correct myself, be creative, and experiment. Words sometimes oblige us to write what we do not intend. I had to accept that I could not bring everything to the table, that I could not make visible what was inscribed for years in affects, "as forces of desire continuously flowing and making connections within and between machines" (Tamboukou, 2003: 216).

Continuing to practice as a support worker and coach confronted me with time. I needed lots and lots of practice before I could begin to make any sense of difference and how it operates in relationships between people. I always wanted to see what was behind the next corner and kept on searching for connections and new assemblages with other people, new ideas and different contexts. It took a lot of time before I could write and before I found suitable concepts with which to work that could really cope with the complexity of the situations. The proximity I experienced in the situations paralysed my ability to write about them. I needed to feel distance before I was able to discern more critically, taking into account different experiences, perspectives and thoughts.

Another struggle had to do with a fear of exploiting people, misgivings about a kind of voyeurism. This struggle was a matter of keeping my integrity. We were working for each other: some children taught me a lot of things and I did everything that was possible to support them. That seemed like a fair deal. Could I now change the deal and do other things with all the wisdom they had brought to me? My strong focus on micro situations made me, the children, their families, teachers and support workers very visible and vulnerable. I was afraid of not being understood: would other people be

interested in learning from stories of children and a lot of different perspectives? Would I be able to explain who these children were and how they managed to turn my (professional) thinking upside down?

Becoming Elisabeth and a researcher also kept confronting me with legitimating the purpose(s) of my work. "The subject-in-becoming is the one for who "what's the point" is an all-important question" (Braidotti, 2006: 148). I wanted to work through experiences, feelings, intuitions, thoughts etc. I wanted to build on, under and between these. I wanted to learn, out of practice, insights and theoretical concepts that made sense of those experiences. I wanted to present complex, fragmented, and multiple stories and characters. On the one hand you see the uniqueness of each child and situation but on the other hand you see certain blueprints that return again and again. "Ways of speaking and doing become habitual patterns that self-replicate even if in doing so they continually diverge from past repetitions" (Lorraine, 2008: 63). Knowing how (not in a technical sense) is more important than knowing what. I wanted to tell about the encounter with the Other in the context of inclusive education. I believe, along with Braidotti, 2006 and Allan, forthcoming, that we as academics have to fulfil a political commitment towards the children and parents who are involved and who know very well what it is like to fight for social change in education and society. How can we open up the outside and relate to the world?

Nightswimming: becoming-minoritarian

When I want to bring all the different layers of my experiences together, the notion of 'becoming-minoritarian' of Deleuze and Guattari can help me to understand how I as a multiple identity am relating to other humans, non-humans and to the world. I can take the freedom to become an 'activist' and 'partner' and 'researcher' and 'mother' all at once and negotiate these different identities in encounter with the Other. If we want to take

responsibility and go for social change, we have to enter into the experience of becoming. "When something occurs, the self that awaited it is already dead or the one that would await it has not yet arrived" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 198-199).

Becoming is a process where stable identities – majorities – continually create new identities rooted in variable and discontinuous fluxes of living. Multiple identities open up new beginnings, new ways of living and thinking. Becoming is transforming our relationship to the world. "It opens up space in which it is possible to think about how it might be possible to do things in a different fashion. It is a politics 'whose ethos is a reluctance to govern too much, that minimises codification and maximises debate, that seeks to increase the opportunities for each individual to construct and transform his own view of life' (Rose, 1999: 193)" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005: 139). It is about crossing thresholds in a cautious, tentative, experimental but nevertheless irreversible way. "There is a type of cracking that is micrological, like the small imperceptible cracks in a dish" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 198). In all the unravelling above, I tried to look in detail at that little 'cracks', being aware that I was only able to describe some.

All becoming is becoming-minoritarian (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 291). In constant movements, we open up one self in diverse actions, connect with the world, escape the status quo with critical thinking, and enjoy the creative flows along undefined boundaries. These processes happen often very silently, without being noticed. They challenge unity and consensus to acknowledge and accommodate many kinds of difference and change the pre-existing order of society, the way in which we govern and are governed. "They carry the potential to transform the affects, beliefs and political sensibilities of a population in ways that amount to the advent of a new people" (Patton, 2007: 11).

Becoming is strictly a matter of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 307), moving away from the centre to the periphery, to the limits of what is deemed acceptable in majoritarian norms. Individually and collectively the minors are subverting the dominant majority “by a creation that explodes it from within” (May, 2003: 149). Becoming-minoritarian is about resistance, “refusing to let those variations be assimilated to binary categories or their implicit tendencies blocked from unfolding new ways of living” (Lorraine, 2008: 68). “Becoming-minoritarian is not and cannot be a state, a station, but must be a process that leaves nothing intact in its wake” (Bensmaia & Curtis Gage, 1993: 62).

Becoming-minoritarian “needs an encounter that allows for new relations to be established and new experiments in live to take place” (Marrati 2001: 212 in Pisters, 2009: 20). The confrontation with the Other imposes becomings and demands the boundaries to become blurred and breached. Working with people with a disability, I felt the need to decipher who they were to understand them more and better. I wanted to unravel their history and deconstruct the mechanism that sets them apart in our society. I tried everything to overcome difference and create common grounds between people with and without disability. “Difference is supposed to vanish, to be dealt with and to be exceeded in favour of a harmonisation of opinions and stands” (Safstrom, 1999: 224). But this does not work. Levinas taught me why not. It is one of the biggest traps in inclusion and inclusive education. I forgot that it is exactly difference that people take into whom they are (becoming). “It is precisely because the You is absolutely other than the I that there is, between the one and the other dialogue” (Levinas, 1998: 146). Difference is beautiful and beauty orients and attracts. People go in and out, say yes and no, go back and forth. “If one could possess, grasp and know the Other, it would not be the Other. Possessing, knowing and grasping are synonyms of power (Levinas, 1987, p90). (...) Eros is only possible as a relation because there are two. That is why we need both proximity and duality” (Todd, 2003:

36). There are always, in encounter with the Other, remains of the Other that stick to you and are irremovable and at the same time we cannot reduce the Other to some version of ourselves. "The other does not fit within my categorization and expectations, my totality and economy, my sameness. The other is a stranger that I welcome in my home" (Joldersma, 2001: 182). This reality asks for a deep respect for the otherness of the Other.

We cannot divide the pie, there is no end on the horizon, and everything is endless variation. "To be taught in the encounter with the Other whom I desire is a *perpetual movement of search*, never satisfied and beyond the order of labour and economic exchange" (Strahn, my emphasis, 2007: 419). A researcher cannot stand still and does not find a fixed reference point of knowledge. "It stresses the need for a positive ethics. It is an ethics based on the necessity of meeting the challenges of the contemporary transformations with creativity and courage" (Braidotti, 2005: 13). We are swimming in a sea full of waves where one idea connects to another, where one person encounters another, where flows are broken... In these lived experiences, identities are featured by mobility and word and body touch.

It looks like order, but most of the time it is chaos. It looks like a plan, but most of the time it goes together with frustrations and dancing in the dark. But working with children and their families in regular schools it is still exciting. "It expresses not only a sense of social responsibility but also an affect. Hannah Arendt used to call it: love for the world" (Braidotti, 2005: 13). At certain moments it makes my blood boil and my heart beat quicker, so I like it. It is about what I am touched by.

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